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FM AMCONSUL MONTERREY

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INFO RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 4547

RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MONTERREY 000064

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SUBJECT: PUBLIC PROTEST AGAINST MEXICAN MILITARY LIKELY ORGANIZED BY DRUG CARTELS

REF: 2008 MONTERREY 0182

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CLASSIFIED BY: Bruce Williamson, Consul General, Monterrey, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. Drug traffickers in northern Mexico appear to be using a new tactic to combat the Mexican military by mounting demonstrations demanding that the military leave. There were demonstrations in Monterrey on January 19, February 9 and February 10. Our contacts report that the narco-traffickers are paying protestors to disrupt traffic in large parts of Monterrey, apparently hoping a groundswell of public outrage against alleged military abuses will force the military out of the state. However, the public appears to support the military, the number of reported abuses is low, and the military remains the only trusted and effective force against the drug cartels in Nuevo Leon. End Summary.

12. (U) The protests began on January 19 with several protests in central Monterrey against the army presence in Nuevo Leon. The protestors, generally numbering about 150 to 200 people, are using coordinated road blocks around the city to highlight their cause. The largest and most disruptive demonstrations occurred on February 9 when groups of protestors blocked four thoroughfares in Monterrey during the afternoon rush, grid-locking large parts of the city for hours. One of the protests occurred in front of the U.S. Consulate General building. While the protest was not directed toward the United States government, protesting in front of the consulate generated additional press interest. The protestors have demanded that the federal army leave Nuevo Leon.

Military Seen as More Honest than Local Police

¶3. (SBU) The overwhelming public perception is that the army forces have had a positive effect in Nuevo Leon. The army is seen as an honest and effective means of law enforcement. Since 2007, President Calderon has deployed troops to several states, including Nuevo Leon, to assist in the anti-crime operations. The military has conducted drug raids, checkpoints, and police inspections. The military assistance has been welcome because many elements of the police force at the municipal, state and federal level are seen as either corrupt or unable to contain the growing violence caused by drug trafficking. According to Miriam Hinojosa, a sociology professor at the University of Monterrey, the lower social classes in particular believe military forces are parts of the solution to combating drug traffickers. The poorer classes are the most vulnerable to the spillover of drug violence and generally lack confidence in police forces.

¶4. (SBU) Police corruption and professionalism in Nuevo Leon varies based on municipality. Some police forces such as the San Pedro police force are well trained, well equipped and well regarded. In some cities including Monterrey, there is widespread corruption. Overall, 60% of cases received by the Nuevo Leon State Human Rights Commission (CEDH), are related to state and local police abuses such as arbitrary detention, mismanagement and impunity (see reftel). In a case that provoked public outrage in 2008, six state police officers mistakenly shot at a family while in pursuit of a group of convenience store thieves. No one was killed but two adults and two children were injured. The Secretary of State Public Security Aldo Facci Zuazua, offered to step down but Governor Jose Natividad Gonzalez Paras refused to approve his request.

Few Military Human Rights Cases

¶5. (C) According to the CEDH, there were only seven cases of military abuse out of nearly 2,500 total human rights claims in Nuevo Leon in 2008. The director of the commission, Minerva Martinez Garza, said that military abuse cases are handled at the federal level but she did feel that the few abuse claims they have received are being addressed. Along the same lines, the Sub-Director of Nuevo Leon Public Security Federico Gonzalez told poloff that he welcomes the military assistance and that the military has been a positive, professionalizing influence on local police forces. The most important case of potential human rights abuse by the military occurred on December 15, 2008 when a pregnant woman drove past a checkpoint and was severely wounded by gunshots. The woman claims to have been shocked by the sight of uniformed soldiers and sped up past the check point. The shooting provoked expressions of concern from human rights groups. The army has formally apologized for the shooting but the outcome of the case is still unknown.

Narco-Traffickers Appear to Organize Protests

¶6. (C) Since the beginning of the protests, Nuevo Leon Secretary of Public Security Aldo Facci has accused drug traffickers of organizing these demonstrations against the army. In a press conference, Facci said that he had evidence,

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including photos, which proves drug traffickers were behind the protests. However, no photos have been released. In our view the allegations that drug traffickers are behind the recent protest are credible. According to reliable Mexican police sources, the protestors are from a poor section of Monterrey controlled by the Zetas, an offshoot of the Gulf Cartel, and the military presence in the area has been disruptive to their operations. The protestors are being bussed in to the central part of Monterrey and are paid roughly US\$35 a person (which may explain the high participation of children, infants and elderly). Many of the male protestors in front of the Consulate also had tattoos common among gang members.

¶7. (SBU) Despite the lack of public evidence of

narco-trafficker involvement, public opinion of the demonstrations has been very negative. The public believes that the protests are backed by drug traffickers and are a major inconvenience. In general, demonstrations are rare in Monterrey, and even then these protests are different than normal demonstrations in Monterrey. The current protests are made up of young, lower class citizens that have not typically been politically active in Nuevo Leon. Additionally, no private NGOs have backed the demonstrations. The protestors have not been willing to talk to the press and in some cases have attacked members of the press. The demonstrations have been peaceful for the most part as police forces have been reluctant to break up or arrest protestors since many of them are children, infants or elderly. The latest demonstrations on February 10 were dispersed by the state police forces but the protestors were allowed to disrupt traffic for nearly two hours.

18. (C) Comment. There have been no recent military human rights cases in Nuevo Leon, so it is hard to believe that these protests were a spontaneous uprising of public sentiment against the military. It seems far more likely that the military's continued operations against drug cartels, while state and local forces refuse to engage, is the real cause of these protests. Based on press coverage and our sense of the situation, the protests have not had the intended effect of bring public pressure against the military, and the public appears supportive of continued military operations. End Comment.

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